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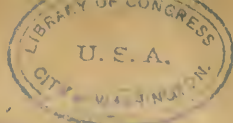












Donato Gideon de Abella, Jr.

## THE LEDGER AND THE ITALIANS.

San Francisco.

The Philadelphia "Public Ledger and Daily Transcript" of the 17th May instant, in making unnecessary and insulting comparisons between the present state of society in his own and other countries, makes the most outrageous allusions to *Italians*. I, an Italian by birth, on that occasion preserved a prudent silence. But, on the following day, the 18th, that paper most plainly and positively called the *Italians* "THE MOST TREACHEROUS AND COWARDLY OF NATIONS," and I found it impossible to allow this to pass unnoticed. I, therefore, on the 19th, gave that paper an Italian lesson, signed by me, copied by another hand, duly enclosed and sealed, and deposited by myself (whilst walking with my wife, a lady of Pennsylvania) in the letter-box of the Ledger office, corner of Third and Chesnut streets. My signature was accompanied with the indication of my lodgings. By this lesson I only intended to afford the editor, privately, an opportunity to prove himself less cowardly than he thought the *Italians*. I had not the least intention to publish it, although the aggression was publicly made, as I expected that the editor would, probably, be thereby induced to make the *amende honorable*. He has, however, treated it with contemptuous silence, which now prompts the publication of the following documents.

*From the Ledger of the 17th inst.*

HONOR.—Public opinion is thoroughly corrupt in some of the States, upon what is called *honor*. Throughout one portion of the country, life and a hard word, or injury, are considered as equivalents, as staked against each other, as weighing equally in the balance. Therefore, if one addresses a hasty or angry word to another, or calls him by a hard name, the provocation is sufficient for stabbing or shooting him upon the spot, without the least hesitation or reflection, and for which crime almost every man goes about prepared, or for deliberately seeking or pursuing him with a murderous intent. And, according to the code of those States, this is due to *honor*. They say that *honor* is dearer than *life*, and that to avenge the slightest trespass upon *honor*, life should be taken without hesitation or mercy, and that the mode of taking it is a point of indifference. Hence we find that stabbing in the back, shooting across streets in the day time, through windows at night, shooting or stabbing men while in their chairs, without warning, before they have time to defend themselves or escape, are almost daily occurrences. And these murders are committed in defence of *honor*! And the public sentiment which prompts and justifies them is called "chivalry!" And the perpetrators regard such crimes as proofs of their *courage*, and regard any tenderness for human life, under what is called a violation of *honor*, as a proof of *cowardice*!

To urge any consideration for human rights, for the suggestions of reason, or the commands of religion, upon people entertaining such sentiments, such ideas of *honor*, would be utterly useless. To minds thus perverted, such considerations would be incomprehensible. But as they are so sensitive upon the subject of honor, courage and chivalry, it is easy to prove that



their conduct is utterly dishonorable, excessively cowardly, and the very reverse of chivalry. *Honor!* What does it mean? They will tell us that an honorable man considers reputation dearer than life, and will prefer death to life in disgrace, and therefore must resent any assault upon his reputation, even to the death of the assailant. Reputation for what? For truth, candor, integrity? Let us analyze their conduct, and scan its consistency. One calls another a liar or a cheat. We admit the full extent of the outrage, and say that the law gives a remedy, and thus protects reputation while it restrains infirmity; and we add that society ought to aid the law, by imposing social condemnation upon the wrong doer. But the party defamed spurns the law, and will not, perhaps, be protected by the countenance of his neighbors for himself, and their condemnation of his defamer; and for redress, in defence of his reputation, he shoots or stabs the defamer upon the spot, without warning, or deliberately seeks and shoots him in the street or before his fireside. And this is done to prove that he is not a liar or a cheat, or in other words, is incapable of false and treacherous conduct. Yet what can be more false, treacherous, perfidious, more indicative of the liar, the knave, more inconsistent with the truth and candor which scorn any advantage, than this sudden murder without warning, or this deliberate murder upon the first opportunity?

Can we find anything fair, frank, ingenuous, *honorable*, in waiting at a corner and shooting a man at a distance with a rifle or musket? In stealing at night under his window, and shooting him through the glass, at his fireside, in the midst of his family? In suddenly pulling out a pistol or a dagger, and shooting or stabbing him so soon as a word passes his lips, and before he can put himself on guard? In our estimation, nothing can be more mean, despicable, treacherous, perfidious, cowardly. It springs, in part, from the same elements of character which prompt to lies, thefts, forgeries, swindling, every crime denoting a mean, false, perfidious heart, with savage, brutal ferocity superadded. Such men denounce the Spaniards and ITALIANS for cowardly assassinations with knives and stilettos, and express great abhorrence for the Indians in shooting men from behind trees. But where is the difference between the knife of a Spaniard and that of a *frank, generous, warm-hearted, honorable chevalier* of the United States, sensitive as a woman on the subject of *honor*? Where is the difference in baseness between an ITALIAN who lies in wait with a stiletto, and a *whole-souled, free-born, American*, who lies in wait with a pocket pistol? Where is the difference between the Indian who steals behind a *tree* with a rifle, and a *chevalier* who steals under a window with a rifle or musket? In the opinion of all really honorable men, such practices are as thoroughly base as any which the perpetrators denounce in Spaniards, ITALIANS, or Indians; and we can see no difference between any individual who carries a pistol or a dirk in his bosom, and the vilest Spaniard or ITALIAN that was ever hired to cut a throat or poison a loaf, or any Seminole who ever picked off a *chevalier* from a tree or a log. The same perfidy, the same falsehood, the same cowardice characterize both.

Such, then, is the *honor* which prompts *chivalry* to so many cowardly and perfidious murders; and such is the *consistency* of those who, while boasting of their tenderness for reputation, their sensitive shrinking from any imputation upon fair, frank, manly, open, straight-forward integrity, shed blood in the basest and most cowardly manner, under circumstances exhibiting destitution of every honest principle, every fair, frank, manly, ingenuous sentiment. And the juries who acquit of a most cowardly, perfidious, stealthy murder, approve all this moral baseness, showing that they



participate in a public opinion whose principal characterizing elements are cowardice and perfidy! Can we wonder at the impunity of murderers and the consequent frequency of murder, when the whole social compact, the whole body of citizens, from whom juries are selected, are thus tainted, depraved, debauched? Can thus approve cowardice, falsehood, perfidy, circumvention, in defence of *honor*? If the majority of citizens would restrain the crimes which are now of daily occurrence, they must enforce the laws; and if they would enforce the laws, each must begin by reforming himself; and to reform himself, each must open his eyes to the total, entire, thorough baseness, meanness, falsity, perfidy, cowardice of the code of *honor* to which they now cling as something more precious than life. True *honor* never prompts to crime, and least of all to crime involving perfidy and cowardice.

*From the Ledger of the 18th inst.*

MURDER MADE HONORABLE.—The time has been when America was the glory of the world for its observance of the laws. In other lands the obligations of the laws were enforced by the bayonet; here, by the moral sense of the people. When the city of Boston was a bubbling cauldron of deadly excitement, certain English soldiers were tried for an offence against the people. The excitement against them was intense and universal. John Adams, the leader of the revolutionary party, was employed to defend them. Recognizing the duty which he owed to the laws he defended the men who were prosecuted by his own partisans; they were tried by a jury composed of the very populace thus excited against them, and, after a full hearing of the facts and the law, they were acquitted. Such was then the respect entertained for the law; and who can doubt that such a people deserved to be free? Again, when the authority of the mother government was disclaimed, and loose provincial governments were established, without the form or sanction of constitution or charter, the people continued to manifest the same respect for the order of society. There was no restraint but moral restraint; but it was all-sufficient. At that time, and long after, murder, if not unknown, was known to be wondered at and feared, as, with the ancients, was the appearance of a comet. It was regarded with unmitigated horror. Yet the men of that generation had as nice a sense of female virtue, as delicate an appreciation of the obligations of honor, and were as ready to dare to do as their descendents. That they did not kill their personal foes (for personal enmities exist in all ages and stages of the human family), because they *feared* to do it, is sufficiently established by their heroism in the revolutionary struggle. When true honor, the honor that is smiled upon by an upright conscience, invoked them, they were ready to lay down their lives and smile at the sacrifice. In those days murder was not the test of courage or honor.

Some six or eight years since, when the use of the Bowie knife in the Southwest made that region infamous, this section of the land spoke and felt abhorrence of a practice so cowardly. It was not courage. THE ITALIANS, THE MOST TREACHEROUS AND COWARDLY OF NATIONS, were the knights of the knife; and the Spaniard the hero of assassination. Americans, it was said, could never descend to imitate their example, or mistake the ferocity of a drunken brute for the courage of a hero. The Mexicans can surpass even the demi-savages of the Southwest in this species of ferocity; and if assassination be courage, and murder be honor, the lowest and most degraded people on the face of Christendom are hereafter to be con-

sidered the most elevated and praiseworthy. Thus was the reign of the Bowie knife and pistol first received at the North and the East. But from single recontres, this species of lawless violence soon swelled into the action of united bodies of men, in the execution of murders which shocked the whole world, under the name of Lynch Law. This also was nothing else and nothing better than the outrages of the ferocious and coward bands of Spain and ITALY. The heroes in these scenes are only heroes in a coward butchery; opposed by half their number of men, resolved in the consciousness of right, they would, like their exemplars in Spain and ITALY seek refuge in flight, or humbly submitting, shame the gallows from which better men had dangled.

It was thought that the time would never come when this demon of the stiletto could have power here. But the popular sentiment for the laws, the virgin feeling which holds them hallowed, once broken, is gone—the door is opened for the most frontless outrage. We commenced in the East with popular riots. They were applauded to the echo that did applaud again; and throughout all the West and South the bravo! bravo! well done! well done! rang again and again. This was the alpha of Lynch law. It was but a step from general to individual crime. That step was to murder. Secret arms, pistols, bowie-knives and dirks were introduced, and murder, “honorable murder, if you please,” became a house-mate with us.

This might have been checked. It only needed a firm and stern exercise of authority on the part of the Courts to check it—and it would have been checked. But the force of popular feeling had become too great; judges, jurors and all bowed down before it; and assassination became as safe here as in ITALY. A half dozen executions would have checked it. But the murder of a daughter in a fit of prepared drunkenness, the assassination of a broker in a pet, the destruction of another because he had done a wrong, are all acts of insanity. In the name of common sense, what is not insanity? And why is it, that these maniacs, the moment that they are acquitted become as sane as the judge that tried them, and perhaps more so?

All this is bad enough. It is sufficiently deplorable that

Such things can be,  
And overcome us like a summer cloud,  
Without our special wonder;

but it is past endurance, that we are constrained to see murder made, not only innocent, but honorable. It is stated that the citizens of Louisville, Kentucky, are about to present to a young gentleman, recently on his trial for a capital offence, a valuable testimonial of their admiration of his conduct. Now we do not doubt that no one regards with more decided disapprobation this measure than the unfortunate young man referred to and his still more unfortunate family; and we freely admit that it can, in no candid mind, excite an unfavorable sentiment against them. But the act itself is one which we shrink from characterizing in the language which it deserves: Is it to be understood that the shedding of the blood of a fellow-being—under any circumstances an act of horror—is to be a matter for a medal? And when that act assumes a character which saves the actor from conviction for murder solely upon the plea of insanity, what is to be thought of those who would illustrate it, hold it up to imitation, by presenting medals and pronouncing eulogiums? It might be thought that the rules of old-fashioned morality had, in these latter times, been reversed; that we read the Bible backwards, and have adopted the motto “evil be thou my good.”

It is impossible that any man can be surprised at murders like the recent one in New Jersey, where gray hairs were clotted with blood; where the sleeping laborer had his slumbers mingled with those of the grave; where fair haired children were slain; and even the mother, with her arms around her babe, was ruthlessly murdered; no one, we say, can be surprised at such acts in the ignorant, where assassination in high life is rewarded with medals. Nor do we consider the testimonials in honor of Capt. Mackenzie a whit more justifiable. In cases of this character, where a homicide has been committed, in relation to which good and wise men differ as to whether it is or is not a murder that merits punishment upon the gallows, it is not only ill-judged, but it is criminal, to reward the homicide. If the act is justified, so be it; but let it rest there. For the sake of humanity, do not reward men, like blood-hounds, in proportion to the amount of blood they shed, especially when the victim is helpless and a prisoner, or when the ball of the assassin enters his back. Even if acquittal in such cases be warranted by the law and the facts, it can never, with a well regulated mind, justify the crowning with laurels and hailing with shouts of the guilty or innocent homicide.

#### TO THE EDITOR OF THE LEDGER.

SIR:—In your paper of yesterday, 18th inst. you state that the “ITALIANS ARE THE MOST TREACHEROUS AND COWARDLY OF NATIONS.”

I am an Italian, Sir. I have the glory to belong, by birth, to the ancient masters and the modern teachers of the world.

You have drawn the proofs of your base and cowardly assertion, I should think, from the old legends of speculating travellers, who have described Italy as she partly was in the past century, and who were actuated 1st. by their interest in humiliating the sole country, whose superiority in all branches of human knowledge made them feel their own insignificance: 2dly. by a desire to revenge the many slaps and kicks which their insane pride caused them to receive in their excursions amongst a people, in whose veins still runs the blood of the Roman and the Samnite: 3dly. by a wish to amuse idle and ignorant masses in their own countries, through catch-penny tales: 4thly. by their having nothing to fear from a nation that, politically speaking, no longer exists; for, divided since sixteen centuries into small and insignificant states, as independent from and foreign to each other as America is to Persia, she has no *political* importance, and, consequently, her inhabitants have no hope of effective protection, should public or private resentments kindle national quarrels.

You have read, perhaps, the French or English translation of the “*Tableau of England and Italy*” published in 1781 by a *Prussian* Captain; but you certainly know nothing about Italy as described by Ginguéné, Madame de Staël, Lady Morgan, and a thousand other writers of the present century, and as reformed under the multifarious influences of the late European revolutions.

In your gross ignorance you have considered Italy as one country and one *nation*, thus charging all Italy with peculiar defects once prevailing in one or two of her corners. The only spots where the Italian *stilletto* ever became famous, were a part of the papal dominions and the city of Naples. I say the city of Naples, for the whole kingdom of Naples and Sicily did not generally participate in the habitual vices created in that immense capital by the Spanish Vice-rois. You pass over in silence, however, the romantic bravery of the Piedmontese, the proverbial honesty of the Lombards, the social refinement of the Tuscans &c. You speak of the Italians



as a small portion of them were at a period when, under the tyranny of the barons, hopeless of all redress and protection from the Vice-regal administrations, some intolerant spirits from time to time took the field against both the baronial and vice-regal despotism, punishing, under the name of *banditi* (outlaws), which are now made synonymous with common highway robbers, their oppressors by destroying every thing before them belonging to those public enemies, and generously devoting the spoils to the relief of the poor and the oppressed.

You know not that since the abolishment of feudal power in Italy by the French, and the establishment of a sound and enlightened police, not one single *stiletto*, not one *pistol*, not one *sword-cane* is to be found on any Italian, from the Alps to the meridional extremity of Sicily; that there all men can travel, day and night, alone, loaded with diamonds and gold, through town and country, without the least danger; that there murders and suicides are as rare as the winter solstices; that there robberies, larcenies, burglaries are but in the proportion of one to fifty, compared to their frequent occurrence elsewhere; that there arsons, forgeries, peculations, repudiations, bigamies, infanticides, false imprisonments, arbitrary executions, are utterly unheard of; that there neither medals, epaulettes, *sabres d' honneur*, or public panegyrics are publicly lavished on assassins; that there no man was ever permitted to keep in slavery any of his fellow-beings, yellow, red, black or white; that no archi-cowardly lynch-laws and prize fights, or other exhibitions of popular fury, such as biting off the ears of law-givers in the public streets, ever disgraced the Italian name; that there no mischievous *prophets* or *quacks* of any kind are permitted to send innocent and credulous people to the mad-house or to eternity; that there judicial flogging, sales of free black or white citizens, fire branding, solitary confinements, fines amounting to full *confiscations* of all property, offended parties turning *legal witnesses* against alleged offenders, and cumulations of two, three, four, or more penalties on the same person for the same crime (including death!!!) are but impossibilities.

It is said, and very justly too, that all nations are made bad or good, by either good or bad laws. How is it, then, that your country, sir, governed by the "*best institutions and laws in the world*," should be the theatre of such innumerable and monstrously atrocious crimes, as you yourself show in your editorial? Should not this teach you to abstain from making odious comparisons between nations, and from indulging in outrages of the darkest nature against those nations that are at peace with yours, and have proved at all times the most friendly and inoffensive towards your country?

Italy, Italy, Italy!!! Can you be ignorant that this vocable is merely a *geographical* one, denoting a small and narrow peninsula, but very little larger than the State of New York, with 24 millions of inhabitants? Could you tell me where an Italian *nation* is to be found? Where is it? You have *nine* small *sovereign* and *independent* populations called Sicilians, Neapolitans, Romans, Tuscans, Lucchese, Modenese, Parmesans, Lombardo-Venitians, and Sardinians, rendered utter strangers to one another by the diversity of their dialects, local interests, governments, laws, politics, police, foreign relations, usages, manners, habits, degrees of civilization, religious opinions, military forces, territorial resources, virtues, vices, propensities &c. that is all. This very diversity, and the presence of a Pope-King, who is still feared all over the globe, America not excepted, the constant permanence of two hundred thousand Austrians in her bosom, and the omnipotent influence of all the European potentates *en masse*, all of them dreading, as did the *Frenchified* Buonaparte himself, the possibility

of again becoming the humble servants of a new Roman Empire, should it ever be permitted to revive, keep that heroic peninsula in the absolute and inevitable impossibility of making a *united*, well combined and decisive effort to throw out from her bosom all exotic dominators. Only an excess of patriotism, of which no other nation has ever offered an example, occasionally induced, here and there, some small but imprudent portions of her inhabitants, from among the *noble* and *professional* classes of her citizens, to attempt her political regeneration, with no other success than to be carried, by thousands, to the scaffold. Indeed, how could they successfully face at once the armed hordes of their own masters, combined with mercenary foreign bayonets, and the opposition of the lowest masses of the people, always devoted to the reigning power, by which they are let loose, when the time arrives, to destroy and plunder the property and take the lives of those philanthropic but powerless classes of *innovators*? Why is it, then, that Germany, divided, as she is, into thirty-six independent sovereignties, silently endures the most insufferable treatment from petty despots, without imitating William Tell, or otherwise attempting to become a nation? But the Germans are too many and too respectable here to be accused of servility, degradation or cowardice.

ITALY TREACHEROUS? How? towards other nations, or towards herself? In the latter case, no Italian population ever complained of any treachery from any of its neighboring populations; they had scarcely any reason to complain of their respective governments. In the former, we only find in the pages of her history, up to this day, the brightest proofs of the strictest faithfulness in all her transactions with other nations. The only Italian treachery suffered by America is her having been discovered by the Italians Columbus, Verrazano, Cabot, and Americo Vespucci, in bearing whose name this hemisphere feels honored. Would you call twenty-four millions of Italians *treacherous* from the fact that lately a poor victim of undeserved and unavoidable misfortune, and, very probably, of irresistible provocations, fired a pistol so *well prepared* for assassination as to prove quite harmless at the distance of three steps? Speak, then, rather of Italy as always betrayed by foreign powers, but never treacherous. The names of Nelson, Benting, Lady Hamilton &c. have been but too recently engraved in her *blue book*.

The alleged *treacherous* character of the Italians is then merely inferred from the necessity, in which they were formerly kept, of revenging with their own hands those distressing wrongs, which their civil laws left unpunished to favor the rich, the powerful, the unbridled feudatory, by resorting to the only means which were offered to them by the laws of nature.

But, ITALIAN COWARDICE! Cowardly and ignorant impostors are they, only, who utter such a stupid blasphemy—yourself in the number, sir. Read Giannone, Muratori, Vico, Gravina, Sismondi &c.; peruse the ancient and modern records of the super-human feats of that classic land (English novel writers apart); ask Piedmont, Lombardy, Calabria and Sicily about their old and even contemporary exploits, in Italy herself, as auxiliaries of the French against the Austrians from 1796 to 1815, and on the mountains of the Tyrol, in Spain, in Poland, in Russia, in Dantzic &c. Ask Massena, “*l’Enfant de la Victoire*,” who lost 25000 veterans on the frontiers of Calabria, without being able to advance one single step into that quarter of the Neapolitan kingdom. Consult the fact of the French having never entered Italy, except when called and favored by the Italians, and of their always having found their tombs there, whenever, abusing their force, they attempt-

ed to treat their Italian brothers-in-arms as *conquered* people. Ask the heroism with which thousands of male and female patriots ascended the scaffold erected by their oppressors, braving, 'til the last moment, both them and death. Ask the innumerable foreign bravoës, who, attempting to cope with the Italian sword in regular duels, have bitten the dust. In America, sir, you have only seen, with but few exceptions, Italian orange and fig sellers, or a few Italian artists or professors, seeking in private and tranquil pursuits, an honest livelihood—would you judge of the true *Italian character* from this scanty number of errant and humble persons! Yet, I do not even believe that any one of these forsaken and isolated individuals, if duly and justly protected by the laws of the country, would tamely submit to the least cowardly insolence from any body. As to myself, one of those unhappy beings, who miraculously escaped the monarchical gibbet in 1820, and in confidence resorted, in 1824, to these shores in search of liberty and the respect due to human rights, I cannot forget my having exposed my life during thirty-four years on European fields of battle, in defence of the same cause that prompted the American emancipation from England; and I cannot now, in spite of my seventy years' age, have the least objection to meet, sword in hand, half a dozen of insolent scribblers of your stamp, sir, who, savagely trampling on the sacred laws of hospitality, dare at once dishonor their own nation, and insult, as you do, the noble land, where I had the enviable lot of receiving the light of day.


Are you, then, so short-sighted as not to perceive that, by wantonly exaggerating the unworthiness of other nations, you virtually induce your own to feel perfectly contented and satisfied with the very horrors of its actual condition which you so loudly deprecate, thus offering it, instead of proper means to remedy its disgraceful evils, a lethal narcotic only calculated to prevent it from making an attempt to ameliorate its fate? Nor do you foresee, it seems, that, by causelessly insulting twenty-four millions of Italians, without however injuring them in the opinion of other nations better acquainted than you with Italian history, you implicitly authorize as many learned and courageous pens to make such retaliations as would speedily and fully vindicate their honor amongst the thinking part of your own countrymen, and at the same time force them to make such disclosures before the civilized world, as to impair your own national reputation, which, to a nation like yours, essentially commercial, is so indispensable.

But you, sir, who so freely qualify the Italians as “the MOST TREACHEROUS AND COWARDLY OF NATIONS,” because, backed by the national favor of seventeen millions of your countrymen, you believe (perhaps erroneously) to have nothing to apprehend from your savage efforts to annihilate a few hundred innocent Italian families scattered all over this immense land, honestly living on their own personal exertions—are you not really the most infamous and dastardly of men? Be your own judge, sir, and believe me

Always ready at your orders,

SANTANGELO.

Philadelphia, May 19th, 1843.

 I addressed the foregoing letter to the “Editor,” instead of the “Editors” of the Ledger, not knowing that its *Editors* were Messrs. WM. S. SWAIN and A. H. SIMMONS. I now loudly bespeak the highest *eulogiums* of the world in behalf of both these *respectable gentlemen*, these advocates of honor and justice! these public preachers of private and public morality! these would be learned and virtuous leaders of American opinion!!!

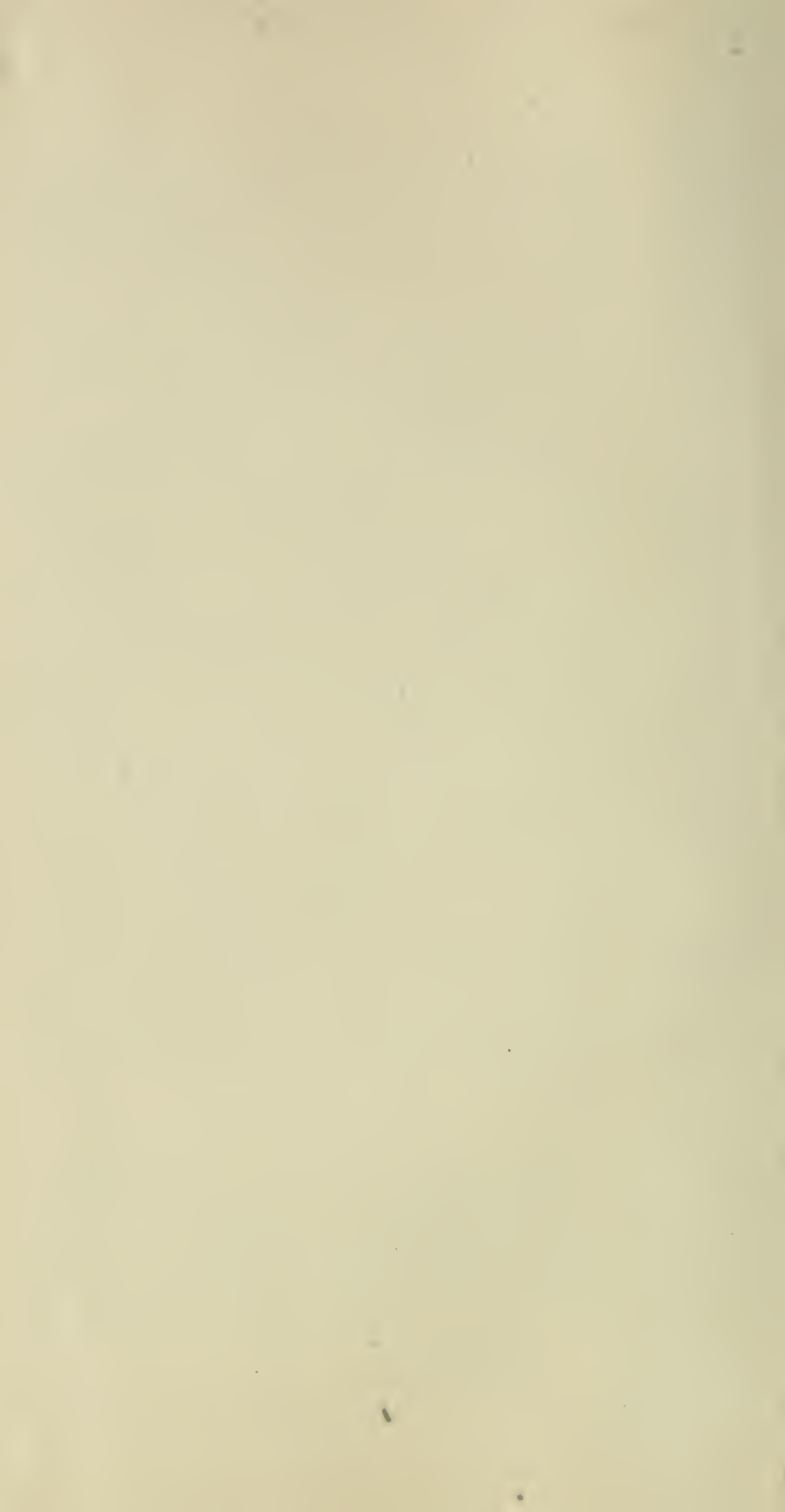
SANTANGELO.

Philadelphia, May 26th, 1843.

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